



## KOPI LUAK

The mammalian family Viverridae consists of an assemblage of about 75 species of Old World Carnivora. In number of species, they comprise the largest family in the order. They are small to medium sized, basically carnivorous mammals. Some species, however, are almost wholly vegetarians, and several species take both animal and plant matter as the opportunity affords; representatives of several other families of Carnivora are similar in this respect. The family Viverridae is reasonably well delineated, and lies between the weasel-like Mustelidae and the dog-like Hyaenidae.

From my rather limited experience, I deduced that the most common viverrid on the island of Java was a creature about the size of a smallish dog, known locally as a "luak." In size, shape, proportions, and color it resembles the common grey fox of the eastern United States, but the similarities by no means end there. Like the grey fox, it is basically nocturnal, and feeds on whatever is available, be it animal (vertebrate or invertebrate) or plant (leaves, stem, flowers, or fruit).

Unfortunately I did not become nearly so well acquainted with the

luak as I would have liked; because of the confused political situation, it was dangerous to wander about by night.

I saw hundreds of luak tracks and droppings among footpaths and other trails in many different localities in Java, but only twice did I encounter a live, free-living luak.

One hot steamy night as I drove along a dirt road on the coastal plain in West Java, a luak ran out of the brush just ahead of me, ran alongside the road for some fifty feet, clearly visible in my headlights, then bounded back into the brush. Had I been back home, I'd not have given the creature more than a passing thought, it was so like a grey fox.

In the other case, I was present by day when a small group of village dogs found and killed a young luak before I could rescue it. I did retrieve the carcass, however, and made a study skin of it.

Judging from tracks and droppings, luaks must be particularly common about coffee plantations, and surely feed quite extensively on the ripe berry-like fruit of the coffee tree. The lower limbs of the small coffee trees, especially when heavily laden with fruit, often touch the ground. The berries are green when immature, but

slowly ripen to a beautiful red. Since the fruit ripens unevenly several pickings are necessary before the pickers get all the crop. Naturally, they try to get all the red fruit each time they pick. Clearly, however, not all red fruits are at the same stage of ripeness when picked.

Although certainly not as efficient as a human picker, the luak is far more selective in the fruits it does pick. It does not take just any red fruit, but chooses, apparently by smell, on fruits at the very zenith of their perfection.

Of course the digestive juices of the luak act on the fleshy portion of the fruit, and this is quite completely digested as the fruit passes along the alimentary canal. However, the juices have little or no effect on the hard endocarp surrounding the seeds, and this is voided intact and unchanged. The seeds (beans) inside the endocarp are completely unaffected.

Of course every villager from toddlers up are well aware of this, and every day in season the village children traverse the roads and trails about the plantation, gathering up the remains of the coffee fruits from the droppings of the luaks.

There are washed in the nearest stream, dried in the sun, and kept entirely separate from the other, more prosaic coffee fruits; they are, as the villagers express it, "jang paling baik" -- the very best.

Coffee buyers pay a premium price for "kopi luak," and when the seeds within the endocarp are removed, roasted, and ground, they command a

price roughly twice that of the next best coffee in the shop.

My wife of long standing, although most reasonable and understanding in nearly every situation, was quite unreasonable in this matter. She adamantly refused to even have "kopi luak" in the house, and although she did not expressly forbid my drinking it elsewhere, it was abundantly clear that she did not want me to try even a small sample.

In deference to her wishes, I have not yet experienced the pleasures of "kopi luak."

Roger W. Barbour, *Indonesian Interlude, Some Adventures of a Field Biologist*, Unpublished manuscript, pp 226-229. He was in Indonesia for two years, 1957-1959.

---

During his last few years of life, with rapidly developing Alzheimer's disease, Roger Barbour was in a grim race to write his memoirs while his memory was still intact. He wrote it on one of the first word processors, a Radio Shack TRS-80, and saved his manuscript on 5.25" floppy disks. I was told this was a time of anguish for him, recognizing his failing mental capabilities, and desperately trying to leave a record of his memoirs. After his death, his son, Jim found someone to convert and transfer the TRS-80 files to MS txt format. Roger managed to complete two book-length manuscripts, one of which was an account of his adventures as an exchange professor in Indonesia. I read both manuscripts and excerpted two articles which I found particularly interesting. Roger's memoirs richly deserve publication. I feel privileged to have known and studied with him.

---

J. Hill Hamon  
Frankfort, Kentucky  
[KyHamon@AOL.COM](mailto:KyHamon@AOL.COM)

J. Hill Hamon, Frankfort, Kentucky  
[KyHamon@AOL.COM](mailto:KyHamon@AOL.COM)